

## Shabbat Shuva- Parshat Haazinu 5763

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Shabbat Shalom.

*“Elohim met, ki im lo lo hayu piguym”* –“ God is dead. Otherwise, there would not be terrorist’s attacks”. This was one of the answers in a project at Camp Ramah Noam, in Israel, this past summer where I worked as the *Rosh Tfilah* – the director of Prayer. We called the project: *“Tzeirei Noam dorshim Elohim”*- “Youth of Noam asking/demanding God”. The idea was to give Israeli children, from seventh grade up to college age the opportunity to write about God, about what they feel and think about God. Every three or four days we changed the questions, and all the time we received many different answers. We asked whether they believed in God; and if they didn’t, what did they believe in. We also asked them if they had a spiritual experience, and if they thought that God cared about what happens with us.

The fear these children and youngsters feel was present in many of these answers, This answer, *“Elohim met ki im lo lo hayu piguim”*- “God is dead, otherwise there wouldn’t be terrorist’s attacks”, came in different words: *“Elohim met ki im lo lo hayu mechablim”*- “God is dead, otherwise there wouldn’t be terrorists”, *“Elohim met ki im lo lo hayu aravim”* – “God is dead, otherwise there wouldn’t be Arabs”, *“Elohim met ki im lo lo hayu ieladim metim”* – there wouldn’t be so many children dying.

These youngsters were talking from the bottom of their hearts, from their deepest fear. From the fear of not knowing how the day is going to end, if they are going to hear about another *pigua* near their homes, or near their friends’ home.

I feel that way sometimes. I feel that when I wake up in the morning with a phone call from my aunt asking me if I took the bus today because there was an explosion in the bus I take sometimes. When I hear the ambulances... and without asking anyone I know what happened. When I watch the *hadashot* – the news, and it seems like a scary movie, but it is a true story that is happening right now, where a terrorist is inside a house with a family with children and babies. When there is someone who looks suspicious in the bus

and I don't know if to stay there or not.

It happened specially when I was at the offices of the "*Tnuat Hamasortit*"- the Conservative Movement, four or five months ago, in downtown Jerusalem, at *Ben Iehuda* street, and I heard a huge explosion, a block away, and then the sirens, and I knew that only because my meeting was longer than I planned, I was still in the office and not in the street, on my way home, in the corner where the explosion was.

It happened also when I saw the pictures of Marla Bennet and Ben Blustein from *Machon Pardes* friends of my friends that died in the explosion at Hebrew University, and when I thought about people very close to me, that studied during the past year everyday at HU.

I know about the suffering of the Palestine People. I know that they are living under curfew in the West Bank, and in Gaza; I know of the children who die because they couldn't get to the hospital, but my pain and my fear is so great that I can barely identify with their pain. I'm afraid of Arabs, and when I see one in the street, either a woman or a man, I cross to the other side. I hate to be afraid of them; I can't tolerate this feeling.

I was raised to love people, I love people, I love life, and I hate not to be empathetic. This is not how it was supposed to be.

I'm talking from the place of a regular Israeli citizen, living in the heart of Jerusalem, living a block away from the "*Shuk Machane Iehuda*"- the Central Market, and working next to Sbarro Pizza, at King George street, and asking myself, are these children who wrote "God is dead" right?

I'm talking from the place of a regular Israeli citizen that received a couple of e-mails this last week from the different *minianim* I frequent in Jerusalem asking to bring guns, not *machzorim* but guns to the services of Rosh Hashana and Iom Kipur.

I'm talking from the place of a regular Israeli citizen, who decides to send clothing to the Arabs in the territories and at the same time presents to the soldiers-*chayalim* in the front of the territories.

Today, in Parshat Haazinu, God said to the People of Israel, through Moses in this song: "*Vaiomer Astira Phanai Mehem, Erhe Ma hacharitam*" (Deut 32:20)- "And He said, I will hide my face from them. I will see what their end will be"

What does it mean? God will hide His face from His people, but He will see the

end? What is the end?

A commentator, Shem Mi Shmuel said about this *pasuk*: “I will hide my face from them; Even if I hide my face from the Jewish People and leave them to their own devices, that will be only in the present. I will see what their end will be. My eyes will nevertheless remain open to ensure their future and their eternity. As far as Israel’s destiny is concerned God’s divine Providence exists eternally” (Torah Gems, Volume 3 page 325).

Even if we feel that God is hiding from us, even if we feel that God is dead, we can know that God is with us and will be with us eternally. But how? How can we know that, if we feel His/Her absence? It is so hard to understand, to accept!

Our *Haphtarah*, that gives the name to this Shabbat, Shabbat Shuva, starts with the words: “*Shuva Israel ad Adonai Elohecha*” – “Return, O Israel, to the Eternal your God”(Hosea 14:2). Return, *Shuva*, *Lashuv*, means to come back home as it is written in the book of Shmuel: “*Utshubato haramata ki sham beito*” (Shmuel Aleph, 7:17) – “Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there”.

The prophet Hosea asks from us to go back to our God, to keep searching for God. Even if it feels that in our personal life, in the land of Israel, and *bechol ioshevei tevel*, all over the world, God is gone, what we have to do is keep searching for God, Because God is telling us in the *parashah* “*Erhe Acharitam*” – “I will see what their end will be”. I’m not leaving you...I know that you can’t feel my presence right now but I’m here and you should keep searching.

So... how we do that, how do we bring God to our life, to our land, to our world? How do we continue living in this world of war, of terrorists’ attacks, of hate, of madness How do we continue living after September eleven?

I’ll tell you the truth... I don’t really know the answer to these questions. I can not tell you how to bring God to your life, I can not tell anybody how to feel God in the darkness, I can only tell you that this is my personal struggle every day, every morning when I wake up.

In 1994, my life changed forever. An explosion for me is a personal matter, and a siren for me is a personal scream. Eight years ago my mother was killed in a terrorist attack. She was killed in the bomb in the AMIA building in Argentina.

My mother was under the rubles seven days, which became an eternity. In those days, my sisters, my father himself a rabbi, and myself, we all prayed on her behalf. On the seventh day she was found.

My question then and my question now was not and is not how did God allow this to happen, but how can we bring God to earth, so that this does not happen again. I knew and I know that Human beings were responsible of this atrocity and not God, and I know more and more that only we, Human Being can make a change so this, does not happen again.

I could choose to escape from God, but I choose to look for Him/Her. I choose to look for meaning in life, and I choose to transform pain and engage life. I choose to keep falling in love, to keep singing and dancing (You don't know how much I love to sing and dance!!). I choose to commit to life and friendship, to commit to Judaism and Education.

Believe me: this is not the easy way, and sometimes I get tired of that but I do it because this is how I understand the deep meaning of the word *Lashuv*, to return to God. But more than that, to return God to this world.

The words of the Psalmist: "*Gam ki elech b'gay Tzalmavet lo ira ra ki atah imadi*"-"Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me", remind us that in the *gay Tzalmavet*, in the valley of the shadow of death, G's is present, and our job is to find Him/Her always.

In the streets of Jerusalem, in the streets of Genin and Gaza, we have to find God, we have to bring Him/Her back. Because if we do that God will return to us as well, as it is written in *the haphtarah*: "*Erpah Meshuvatam, ohavem nedava*" (Hosea 14:5)-"I will heal their affliction generously and I will I take them back in love".

So... How we do that?

Before Iom Kippur, every one of us, should ask him/herself what we could do to not feel the absence of God in the world, how we can bring to our lives, to the humanity, to these children who wrote "God is dead", the *Shkinah* back.

The Esh Kodesh, Kolonimus Kalamish, The Piazene Rebbe, who was the Rabbi in the Warsaw Ghetto, and perished in the *Shoa*, said, during the *Shoa*, that *isurim*-suffering, torture, are not the *hastarat panim*- hiding face of God, but how we live, how

we deal with the *isurim*. If we are able to find in our deepest and most terrible pain the hand of God, certainly we won't feel any more the *Hastarat Panim*.

It is hard to understand the meaning of the words of the Esh Kodesh, it is so hard to believe deeply in what he believed. But when I think about the Esh Kodesh giving a Dvar Torah in the Ghetto, and knowing that he will be taken I can learn from his amazing words that it is in our hands to change the "*hastarat panim*"- The hiding face of God, to "*ias tireni beseter ohalo*"- "God will conceal me in the concealment of His/Her tent", as we are reading in the Psalm 27 from Rosh Hodesh Elul until Hoshanah Rabah.

We have to find the way to bring God back to these children, who feel a deep fear, and wrote that God is dead. Especially we have to bring the *Shkinah* to our own lives, to the Land of Israel, to our world, and I believe that the way to do that, is as the Prophet Micah said:

*"Hagid lecha adam ma tov, uma Adonai doresh mimcha. Ki im Asot mishpat, chesed, veatznea lechet im elohecha"*- "He has told you O Man, what is good, and what God requires of you: Only to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk modestly with your God" (Micah 6:8) and to try to believe that "God will conceal me in the concealment of His/Her tent" - "*ias tireni beseter ohalo*" (Psalm 27.)

This is Shuva Israel.